## The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

PERIAL OFFICE DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE AND THE PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF TOWERTHER.

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## NORTH WEST REBELLION

HOWARD ANGUS KERNEDY,
of "The Story of Carolog," "The Book of the West,"
New World Fary Book!" "Father Locembe," etc.

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#### THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY

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Coppright, Canada; 1919, by

A SHOT rang out over the snow, and Canadians awoke to find themselves plunged in a western war. Before that war was over, half a dozen battles had to be fought. Three armies spent the summer in hard marches over hundreds of miles of uninhabited prairie and through a wilderness of forest and muskeg. The peace we now enjoy was dearly bought, at the price of many a brave man's life, to say nothing of all the time and money wasted and the settlers' homes burnt down.

In 1869, then, a quarrel broke out in the pioneer settlement of the West, on the Red River. Like most quarrels, it was caused by a lack of good sense on both sides.

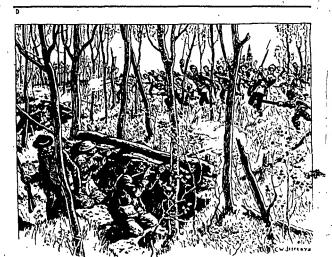
The Dominion of Canada, formed two years earlier by the union of four eastern provinces, arranged to take over "Rupert's Land" and the "North-West Territory" from



<sup>\*</sup>Mr. Kennedy, representing The Montreal Daily Witness and New York Herald, was an official observer of many of the events he relates here.

the ancient Hudson's Bay Company, which had ruled the West for nearly two hundred years. Now the Company only held possession under the supreme ownership of the Imperial Government, over in England. That Government was preparing to issue the Royal Proclamation which would give the Territory to Canada. The Canadian Government, however, without waiting for this plecessary act to give them legal possession, sent a party of surveyors up to start road-making and map out the land in squares for the settlers who were expected to follow. This the surveyors proceeded to do; and new-comers began to stake out land for themselves.

This alarmed the settlers already living on the Red River. They numbered about 12,000, and only some 1,500 were "white folk." The rest were descendants of French voyageurs and Scottish and English furtraders, in the old Company's service, who had married Indian wives. These folk were known as "Métis," or people of mixed



#### THE BATTLE OF BATOCHE

The rebels at Batoche occupied a strong position on the northern slope of the hillside descending from the open prairie toward the village, which lay along the lower plateau bordering the banks of the river. Here, hidden among bushes and thin woods, they dug long lines of rifle-pits, in which they sheltered themselves. Most of these pits may still be seen, and show the skill with which Gabriel Dumont. Riel's military commander, took advantage of the irregularities of the ground for purposes of defence. In order to attack the position, the troops were compelled to advance over open country, and expose themselves against the sky on the edge of the hillside to the fire of the rebels, many of whom were expert marksmen, hunters of the wild fowl and buffalo of the prairie.

The illustration depicts the rush of the troops on the last day of the fight, as seen from the line of rifle-pits. Through the screen of trees and bushes, veiled in the thin foliage of early spring, are seen the men of the Royal Grenadiers and the Midland Battalion dashing down the hillside. In the distance, over the crest of the slope, shows the spire of the church, which still exists to-day, and around which much of the earlier skirmishing took place.

blood; and this is a better name than "half-breed." Some of them, in fact, were more than half white. Well, they were used to the old Company's rule, but did not know what kind of regulations they would have to obey from the new Government; and, anyhow, they had not been consulted about the change, which had been agreed to over their heads.

The Métis, like the Indians, loved buffalohunting more than farming, while the buffalo lasted, and also, unlike the white men, they took an active part in the wars that Indian tribes were constantly waging against each other.

Paul Kane, a Canadian artist, who visited the Red River in 1846, tells how he rode out with a party of Métis on their half-yearly buffalo hunt, and the first "game" they stalked was a band of Sioux Indians, of whom they brought down eight at one volley. "They abandoned the dead bodies to the malice of a small party of Saulteaux who accompanied them." These Indian

allies immediately started a scalp dance, "during which they mutilated the bodies in a most horrible manner." When the hunters came up with the buffalo, they killed about five hundred in one hour; and every year thousands were destroyed in the same way, by the Métis alone. As the Métis were only a handful compared to the Indians, and as white men came in to join in the "sport," it is little wonder that in 1870 the buffalo herds were fast thinning out.

The farms, such as they were, consisted of long narrow strips running back from the river. This was a convenient plan, for it enabled the people to live close together in a string along the bank of the river, which was their principal road, both summer and winter; besides, it gave every family easy fishing and easy watering for man and beast.

A young Métis named Louis Riel, better educated and worse tempered than the great majority of his people, took the lead in opposing the surveyors, and even forbade them to go on with their work. His followers

suspected, for one thing, that this square survey system would rob them of their own long homesteads.

Riel took possession of Fort Garry at Winnipeg, the old Hudson's Bay head-quarters. He sent an armed band to the frontier, and kept out of the country the new Canadian Governor who had come round through the States to take possession of the territory in the name of the Dominion. He even set up what he called a Government, with himself as President, and imprisoned many who dared to oppose him. One of these, a young Ontarian named Scott, was tried by a Métis "court-martial" under one Lépine, and cruelly put to death.

You may imagine the excitement and indignation this aroused in Canada. A little force of Imperial soldiers and Canadian militia was sent up to put down the revolt, and reached Winnipeg on the 24th of August, 1870, after a long journey by river, lake and trail—the old fur-traders' route to the West. The expedition was led by Colonel Garnet

Wolseley, afterwards famous as Lord Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.

The usurping "President" Riel fled from Fort Garry a few minutes before Wolseley marched in. A Royal Proclamation was made, transferring the Territory to Canada, the Red River settlement became the heart of a new province, Manitoba, and the Hon. Adams Archibald was safely installed as Governor.

Not long afterwards, however, a fresh danger had to be faced, this time from outside. A band of Irish "Fenians" in the United States, having no quarrel with Canada, but moved by hatred of the British Government, invaded the Territory from Minnesota and seized a Hudson's Bay post at West Lynne, north of Pembina. The Governor called for volunteers to repel the invasion, and among those who answered the call were Riel and Lépine, at the head of a band of Métis. As it happened, the invaders were followed and quietly taken back

across the frontier by United States troops.

The Métis got their right recognized, to the lands they lived on, and received also "scrip" entitling each of them to a share of the public land—though most of them promptly sold this scrip for a trifle. The Red River settlement and the surrounding country became the Province of Manitoba, and peace appeared to be firmly established. The murder of Scott, however, was still unpunished, and the Province of Ontario offered \$5,000 reward for the capture of his murderers. In 1874 Lépine was tried and sentenced to death. Against Riel, who was not to be caught, a "warrant of outlawry" was issued. On account of their loyal action at the time of the Fenian invasion. Lépine's sentence was commuted to two vears' imprisonment and Riel was demned to five years' banishment. As a matter of fact, the Federal Government had already paid him \$4,000 for "expenses," to get him out of the country.

Some of the wilder spirits among the

Métis, instead of settling down like the rest as citizens of a province, now pulled up stakes, loaded their families and their few household articles on their old two-wheeled carts, mounted their cayuses, and struck out for the farther west.

They were leaving a "paradise of fertility," as a Canadian explorer had truly named it; but it had lost a good deal of its charm, for men like these, with the passing of its free and easy pioneer days. Were there not other and freer Edens to be had for the taking?

Gabriel Dumont, a famous buffalohunter, led one of the parties in this exodus. Halting at last in the beautifully-wooded valley of the South Saskatchewan, about halfway between the present city of Saskatoon—then unborn—and the fork of the two Saskatchewans, Dumont's band started a new riverside colony of the old Métis pattern. In this settlement of St. Laurent the old hunter set up a little Métis government; but he dropped this scheme when a

company of the newly-formed Mounted Police paid him a warning visit. This was in 1875.

The Métis and Indians very soon discovered that even out on the Saskatchewan they could not have all the country to them-There was no railway then through Canada to the West; but already such a line had been promised by the Dominion Government, and white farmers began to arrive in advance of it, coming up through the Lakes or round by way of the States. Scattering. over the Territory in search of choice homesteads, some of the new-comers pitched on land around Battleford-the Territorial Capital, that was, before Regina's time while others settled about the Hudson's Bay post of Prince Albert, with the Métis St. Laurent for neighbours.

Again the Government surveyors had to come and map out the land for the settlers, and again there was trouble. For one thing, there was great delay in opening a land office where settlers in the Prince Albert district

could make entries for their homesteads; till that was done all the settlers were only squatters. There was more delay in assuring the Métis of their title to the land they lived on, and in granting "scrip" to those who demanded it. And there were other grievances.

The Métis in 1884 got Louis Riel to come back from the States and help them in pushing their demands. At first he only carried on his agitation in lawful ways, such as presiding over public meetings, from which petitions were sent to the Federal Government. The Ottawa authorities, however, seemed deaf to all complaints. When at last word came that the Métis' principal claims, for land and scrip, would be recognized, it was too late to avert the bursting storm which had been allowed to gather.

Riel himself could doubtless have prevented the outbreak, and indeed he had offered to quit if the Government would pay him a large um of money. But the Government neither agreed to his demands nor took

steps to prevent him in his anger from blowing the spark of rebellion into flame.

And that is what he did. He called the Métis to arms, and got them to set up a "Provisional Government" with himself as "President." On the 18th of March, he led an armed party to a white man's store at Batoche and demanded arms and ammunition. The store-keeper refused. He and his clerk were made prisoners, and the store was looted. The rebellion had broken out.

Some of the white settlers had unwisely joined the Métis in the invitation which brought the trouble-maker back to Canada; but when he showed himself resolved on violence, they refused to have anything more to do with him. So did the priests of the Roman Catholic Church, to which the French Métis belonged. This only made him the more angry and violent.

The dramatic scene which closed that fatal 18th of March at Batoche was vividly described to me by Father Paquette, a priest

who happened to be staying close by. At midnight Riel marched in, the reverend father said, "with eyes like the devil's," to proclaim that he had "destroyed the old Romain" and got a new pope, a French-Canadian archbishop. "You are to obey me!" he declared. That, the indignant priest replied, he would never do. Then "I will get Indians to fix you," Riel exclaimed; adding that next day he would proceed to destroy Fort Carlton and "the soldiers."

Fort Carlton was an old Hudson's Bay post, eighteen miles away on the North Saskatchewan, garrisoned by Mounted Police and volunteers from Prince Albert. Major Crozier, the officer in command, contemptuously refused Riel's demand for the surrender of the fort, and on the 26th set out with eighty-five men to save the contents of a store at Duck Lake, which the Métis had begun to loot. The rebels awaited him, in a well-chosen position, and he was driven back, leaving a dozen men dead on the snow.

The first fight had been won by the rebels! The news fell on Canada like a thunder-Regiments of eastern volunteers and batteries of artillery were rushed off to the imperilled West. They were not allowed to go through the United States, and Canadian Pacific Railway, begun in 1881, still unfinished. If the Canadian Pacific Company had been content to build the line in ten years, as its contract with the Government required, the troops might not have reached the West till a large part of the white population had been wiped out. Happily, that plucky company had set itself to do twice as well as it had promised and give Canada its great national highway in five years, which most folk thought impossible. Between Montreal and the Rocky Mountains only four gaps, of about one hundred miles in all, north of Lake Superior, remained unbuilt when the war broke out. Across the two longer gaps the troops were carried in sleighs, leaving only about thirty miles for them to march through the snowbound woods and over the ice of the lake.

Eight days after the soldiers had left the East they landed on the prairie at Qu'-Appelle, where a Winnipeg battalion and two field guns had already arrived.

There was terrible need for hurry, for Riel was trying desperately to spur the Indians on to the war-path. Playing upon their credulity, he claimed to be a Messiah, with supernatural power, sent to lead the redskins and give them victory over the white men who had taken possession of their country. There were 25,000 of these pureblooded redskins, including many braves with a great fighting record. If they had joined forces with the Métis, they could have deluged the West with innocent blood.

Happily, the influence of missionaries and Mounted Police, with the astonishing evidence of Canada's power in the thousands of men who had just built a road of steel across the plains—and the British fair play which the tribesmen north of line forty-nine had received from the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian Government—kept most of the Indians quiet. They were,



however, just then in a state of nervous unrest, for the buffalo on which they had lived were gone altogether, and they found it very hard to settle down to a humdrum farming life. In a number of tribes, especially along the North Saskatchewan, the wilder spirits yielded to the inflammatory speeches and tempting promises of Riel's messengers, and dragged their fellow-tribesmen into lawless and rebellious deeds; though few even of these braves could be induced to go and fight alongside the Métis in arms.

The worst tragedy of that black year occurred at one of the loveliest spots in all the lovely park-lands of the north—Frog Lake, over a hundred miles north-west of Battleford. There, among charming hill and dale, musical rivulet and placid lake, rich flower-spangled glade and rustling copse, lay side by side a pioneer village and a Cree Reserve.

Excited by the news of Riel's "victory" over white men at Duck Lake, the most

savage members of the tribe got the upper hand. Setting at naught their old chief, Big Bear, they chose a wild young man named Wandering Spirit as war chief. On the 2nd of April a band of painted braves took their guns and knives and went down to the settlement. Big Bear went toohoping to prevent mischief, as he afterwards The raiders gathered all the white folk together, out of doors, and Wandering Spirit ordered Tom Quinn to march up to the Indian camp. Quinn was the Government's Indian Agent, and had some little Sioux blood in his veins. He despised the Crees, and refused to obey. Wandering Spirit shot him down.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Big Bear. It was no use. The tiger spirit was up, and was only glutted when nine victims lay dead, including two missionary priests. Only one man was spared—W. B. Cameron, a clerk in charge of the Hudson's Bay store. The two white women in the settlement—their husbands had been slain before their eyes

—were ransomed from their captors by friendly Métis in the Indian camp. No woman, nor any Hudson's Bay man, was touched, all through these troubles.

Ten days later, the same Indians laid siege to Fort Pitt, an old Hudson's Bay post on the river thirty miles away, near the boundary between Alberta Saskatchewan. Īt had a garrison twenty-two Mounted Police, commanded by Captain Francis Dickens, a son of the famous novelist; besides the Hudson's Bay factor, William MacLean, with his family and a score of other civilians. There was no lack of courage; even the MacLean girls took their turn on guard, rifle in hand. But the Indians threatened to burn the wooden buildings down with fire-arrows unless the Police went away and the other white folk came into camp, where they were promised protection. "I want you to cross the river at once"—Big Bear sent this message to the captain—"for my young men are terrible hard to keep in hand."

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BIG BEAR'S DEMAND FOR THE SURRENDER OF FORT PITT

There was no choice. The civilians put themselves at the mercy of the red men, who for the next two months kept them prisoners, wandering about in the woods. The Police embarked in a leaky old scow and navigated their painful way down stream for a week, through floating slabs of ice, a hundred miles to Battleford.

They found Battleford itself in a state of siege. The whole white population of the district, about five hundred and sixty men, women and children, had taken refuge within the Mounted Police stockade. This

fort, and the little town, stood high on a point of land in the fork of the Battle and Saskatchewan Rivers, where they were free from attack. But the older village south of the Battle, where the Territorial Government had once been carried on, was looted by Stoneys and Crees from neighbouring Indian Reserves, and some of the houses were burnt.

In the early days of the trouble a Government Farm instructor had been killed on one of the Stoney Reserves, and a wandering Stoney had shot down a white farmer whom he happened to see greasing the wheels of a wagon. But after that the Indians were satisfied with gorging themselves on stolen cattle, keeping up their spirits by frenzied dances, and waiting to see what Riel would make of his rebellion. Poundmaker, the most famous of the Cree Chiefs, was too wise to imagine that anything but mischief would come of it. He eyen tried to get away, planning to take refuge with the Blackfeet, who were enjoying peace and

quietness in the far south-west. His wilder comrades, however, would not let him go, and he was practically a prisoner in the Indian camp, like many others who saw no sense in defying the white man.

All the scenes of trouble were far north of the railway, and could only be reached by trail across the prairie, where for hundreds of miles no human dwelling had yet been raised and not an ounce of food was to be had for man or beast.

Three little armies were ordered to strike north from various points on the railway. The first column, of eight hundred and fifty men, started from Qu' Appelle. It was led by General Middleton, commander of all the Canadian militia. He aimed at crushing the Métis at Batoche; then, if that did not scare the Indians into good behaviour, he would go on up the Saskatchewan and join the other columns in restoring peace throughout the West. The second column, about five hundred strong, under Colonel Otter, marched north from Swift Current to

the relief of Battleford. The third column, commanded by General Strange, went north from Calgary to Edmonton, through a region where Indians had looted a few stores and might at any time do worse—then he turned down the North Saskatchewan to Frog Lake and Fort Pitt.

Each column, formed chiefly of riflemen, included a very few nine-pounder guns, and as many Mounted Police as could be spared from the duty of watching the tribes in the south. Each column, too, had to be accompanied by hundreds of wagons full of hard-tack, salt pork, corned beef, dried apples, tea and sugar for the men, with hay and oats for the horses. The middle column, indeed, had to carry even wood for cooking, for the Battleford trail ran over "bald-headed" prairie nearly all the way.

The worst experience the General's men encountered was having to wade through knee-deep mud—until, on the 24th of April, they came to Fish Creek, within a dozen miles of Batoche. There they were suddenly held up by Gabriel Dumont and a

party of Métis and Indians, who had come out to check their advance. Dumont had skilfully chosen the best spot purpose, his men being hidden among the trees on the steep banks of a ravine which the troops had to cross. Every attempt to get at the "hornets' nest" of the enemy failed, and before sunset ten of our men had been killed and forty wounded. By morning the Métis had cleared out of the ravine; but the General decided not to go on until he could dispose of the wounded and bring up reinforcements. A field hospital was established at Saskatoon, where a few pioneers had laid the foundation of the present city.

Though a Black Friday for Middleton's men, that 24th of April was a red-letter day for Otter's column, with which I rode; for that morning we marched into Battleford, having covered one hundred and fifty miles in five and a half days, and the Indians slunk away through the woods without firing a shot. Great was the rejoicing in the beleaguered town.

Without waiting for General Middleton

to come up, Otter decided to take half his force and "finish Poundmaker," who was supposed to be in command of the Indians thereabouts. On the 1st of May, therefore, we started for the Indian camp, thirty-five miles away in the west, and rode all night, hoping to catch the "enemy" before they awoke in the morning. We got caught instead, because one old Indian with the early-rising habit went out of camp to round up some cattle, and heard us coming. He gave the alarm; the Indians rushed from their tents, and met us at the top of a long open turfy slope which we had climbed after crossing the gully of Cutknife Creek. Several men fell on each side, shot at close quarters. But then the Indians dived out of sight, into the wooded gullies on both our flanks. They even got round behind us, into the gully we had just crossed.

We were completely surrounded. With two little seven-pounder guns and a gatling we held the top of the slope; but the sevenpounders' old wooden gun-carriages were

rotten, and gave way under the shock of firing. Major Short, commanding the artillery, shouted "Who'll follow me?" and started on a dash for the Indian camp, with gunners, police and riflemen close at his heels. "That was the one time we were afraid," a Cree brave told me afterwards; "we had no magazine rifles and could only have fired one shot before you'd have captured our camp." But the major was ordered back, and the chance was lost.

Our men opened out in skirmishing order, lying down along the crest of the slopes and firing down into the gullies. They were as brave and cool as veterans, most of these young men of ours, though few had ever been under fire before. But the Indians firing up from the gullies picked off one after another, with little loss to themselves, and bullets whistled in from every direction. After five hours of this weary work, hungry and thirsty, under a hot western sun, our men were allowed to dash down and clear out the gullies. The Indians fled before cold

steel, and in the lull our colonel gave the order for retreat. We could not have held the position a single night.

The victorious Indians, coming boldly out into the open, swarmed down after us over the battle-field we were leaving in their possession. They were checked by the steady rear-guard fire; but when we got out of sight they would have followed and picked us off where our homeward trail lay through dense woods—only Poundmaker this time succeeded in stopping them.

Encouraged by this success, the Indians at last yielded to the persuasion of Riel's envoys and started eastward to join forces with the Métis at Batoche. As they streamed across the Swift Current trail, a whole train of wagons loaded with supplies for our men fell into their hands.

In the nick of time, General Middleton's troops succeeded in crushing the Métis force at Batoche before the Indians could get there.

Making a fresh start on the 7th of May

from Fish Creek, and circling eastward over the prairie to avoid the brush fringing the river, the General's column early on the morning of the 9th stood once more on the edge of the great valley. The trail from the prairie level to the river 150 feet below ran through dense brush. Not content with the cover of the woods, the Métis had dug a series of rifle pits to guard the trail.

Our skirmishers advanced into the edge of the woods, but met a heavy fire from the hidden pits. The guns, pushing forward till they could shell houses held by the enemy down by the river, received a volley from the woods close by, and were ordered back. Bullets even came whistling in at long range from over the river.

Some help had been expected from the steamer *Northcote*—one of those flat-bottomed stern-wheelers which alone can navigate the sand-banks of our prairie streams; they will "float in a heavy dew," it used to be said! The *Northcote*, however, came in collision with the ferry cable

ille felly cable

stretched across the river at Batoche. Her smoke-stacks were smashed, and she had drifted two miles below the scene of action before she was got under control. Then she had to go hunting fuel, and the battle was over before she again put in an appearance.

The General withdrew his men to camp for the night, and renewed his skirmishing attack in the morning,—again without result, except, as he said, to give the young soldiers practice and confidence. "They were being taught, by somewhat painful experience, the necessity of using the enemy's tacties and keeping themselves under cover." That was Sunday, and as the Métis followed up the troops on their withdrawal in the evening, the minister holding a field service in camp had his voice almost drowned by the rattle of musketry. Next day the skirmishers advanced a little farther into the woods, and even carried a few of the rifle pits before their third retirement.

On the fourth day, the 12th of May, the General took all the mounted men of his force, with a couple of guns, and rode north,

to make a feint attack on Batoche from that quarter and draw the enemy away from their southern defences. The sound of his guns would be a signal to Col. Van Straubenzie, left in charge\_of—the infantry, who were then to press in from the south. But a strong wind was blowing, and the Colonel heard so little sound from the guns that he held his men back. The General, returning to camp at mid-day, was "much annoyed." But very soon, in the middle of his lunch, he was also much surprised,—by loud cheers rising from the river side.

It turned out that a battalion and a half of the infantry, after an early dinner, had been ordered to advance from the south and go as far as they could. With a rousing cheer they began rushing the rifle pits, cleared them out, raced across an open space to the village of Batoche, which they captured,—and in half an hour the battle was won. Eight of our men had been killed and forty-six wounded in the four days' fighting.

Many of the Métis and their local Indian allies surrendered immediately, and from

that afternoon not one of them fired a shot. Riel was captured three days later by a party of scouts, though Dumont got away to Montana.

On hearing of Riel's collapse, the Indians coming down from the west called a halt, and on May 26 the Chiefs came in and surrendered at Battleford.

The Frog Lake murderers, however, were still to be caught, and their prisoners to be set free. General Strange's force found and attacked them on the 28th, in a strong position on a hill called Frenchman's Butte, near Fort Pitt. Some of the prisoners escaped in the confusion; but the Indians got away, fleeing northward with the rest of their captives. Four flying columns were now formed to hunt them by as many trails through the woods, and one of these columns, to which I had attached myself, penetrated the forest as far as Beaver River.

It was hard going. In the park lands the trail was often good and firm; but even here a gang of road-makers had to keep ahead of

us, patching up soft places with brush, and occasionally the men had to help six horses to haul our little field gun over a bad spot,—all hands on the ropes. Farther on, the trail vanished altogether, and we had to pick a perilous way round the edge of a muskeg, with not an inch of dry ground between wood and water. Summer had brought the mosquitoes out in clouds, and they feasted royally, while our own food was running short and we had not even sugar for our slough-water tea. But the grass was rich, the horses fed as happily as the mosquitoes, and we men, despite all hardships, never had a healthier time in our lives.

At Beaver River the last of the prisoners escaped from their hurrying captors, with the help of friendly Indians who had only been dragged on to the war-path by threats from the hot-heads. Big Bear, though we now gave up trying to catch him, turned back and surrendered at Prince Albert. Riel, and eight of the Indian murderers, were tried and executed. Big Bear and Poundmaker were

imprisoned but after a few months were set free. The citizen soldiers, their painful duty bravely done, went back to their business; the hundreds of western settlers who had spent the season teaming for the army returned to their farms; the Métis and Indians, as much relieved as the rest of us by the end of the nightmare, settled quietly down, to learn, though with varying degrees of speed, the ways of white civilization.

With the inrush of settlers by the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was finished from coast to coast before the year was out, the West became definitely a White Man's Land, and the dream of any future trouble from the old wild spirit was banished forever.

## THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

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